Jim Carroll

Life beyond geekism

I am in awe of geeks.

And I use that phrase with a tremendous amount of respect.

I'm not a technological neophyte — I've got my head deep into Linux, assemble my own PCs, and understand firewalls to the level of packet filtering. I hang out on slashdot.org, and probably understand 95% of what I read.

Yet I couldn't program in C++ if my life depended on it. I just don't have the logical mindset that comes with being a real hard core geek. I've tried to figure out assembly language, but came to realize that my meager brain couldn't do it. Twenty years ago, I wrote some stuff in BASIC, but have never quite figured out Perl.

And so I have always held those who can do things that I could never comprehend in a tremendous amount of esteem.

Yet even as I have come to respect the skills that many of you possess, I've long been wanting to scream at you. Why? Because I find that far too many of you become too enamoured with the technical side of the world around you. You get too deep into your computers, and as a result, doom yourself to a life as a code-jockey. You don't realize that with just a little bit of effort and a bit of a refocus, you can open up your career to a wider world, and discover a heck of a lot more opportunity, while still doing the things that you love.

The problem is that too many geeks think it is easy to make technology work. Simply throw a few bits at a problem, and we can change the business world! Write some code, and business opportunities open up! Build a neat Web site with Shockwave animation, and customers will flock onboard! But the fact is, making technology work requires a heck of a lot of business insight and strategy as well.

I've come to realize over the last few years that one of the reasons for my success as an author and speaker is this: I've got a unique and not-often found combination of technical skills and business strategy. I'm a chartered accountant with semi-geek status. I've put together a unique blend of business capabilities with a technical mindset, which makes me unique and invaluable in helping the business world comprehend the role of technology, and understand how it can best be used. I'm helping in my own small way to redefine the economy of the future, and can help senior management of companies comprehend what we need to do to survive in the wired economy of the 21st century.

Those of you who decide to marry your technical skills with business skills will be those who really discover opportunity in this new millennium. I think that the ideal career candidate for the economy of the future is someone who can write Java apps at the same time they can prepare a detailed corporate business strategy, since they will be able to understand how to implement technology strategies that make business sense.

Those of you who take the time to combine your talented technical skills with a degree in commerce or business administration will find that countless doors will be open to you. Those of you who make an effort to get some practical business knowledge and experience under your belt will find that you can be a leader in changing the business world around us. Those of you who take the time to work within your companies in departments completely unconnected with computerization will discover a breadth of knowledge that will make your later efforts to computerize the company that much more relevant.

You'll also find that you'll earn quite a bit more, get more respect, and have more of an opportunity to change the world in the era of e-biz. And you'll have a more exciting career than those of you who remain code-jockeys, lost in the intricacies of the bits and bytes. ◀◀

Jim Carroll is the co-author of Light Bulbs to Yottabits: How to Profit by Understanding the Internet of the Future. *He can be reached via e-mail at:jcarroll@jimcarroll.com and on the web at www.jimcarroll.com.*